

Historic, archived document

Do not assume content reflects current scientific knowledge, policies, or practices.

3 Hh
HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

Friday, August 9, 1935

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "GREEN CORN." Information from the Bureau of Home Economics, and the Bureau of Plant Industry, United States Department of Agriculture.

--0000--

The food that has the platform this morning is a one hundred percent American vegetable -- born and bred on our own soil. Probably you remember that the early settlers to this country found the Indians using a curious kind of grain as a staple food. The settlers soon named the grain, "Indian corn" or maize. They made it's acquaintance just in time, too, from all I hear, for it saved many of them from starvation during those first hard winters. The Indians taught the settlers how to plant and raise corn, how to roast the green ears in summer, how to combine corn with beans to make succotash, how to dry the grains for winter, and grind them between stones for meal. And ever since those early days Indian corn has become an important item in our American diet.

Well, the green corn season has arrived in many parts of the country now. And, shades of childhood, that brings up memories of corn roasts and games of I-spy in the cornfield and empty cobs piled high on the kitchen table after dinner. You might suppose that every good American would know how to cook this native vegetable of ours to perfection. But many good fresh ears of corn are allowed to stand in the kitchen until they lose their sweetness or are cooked so long that they come on the table tough and shrivelled.

Actually green corn is easy to cook -- to perfection. The chief point to remember is that it's an impatient vegetable. It simply can't stand and wait before cooking and still keep its best qualities. It can't stand too long in the kettle, either. And it can't stand much of a wait after cooking. That old adage -- "Out of the garden and over the fire" applies to corn especially. The shortest time from garden to kettle gives best results. As for cooking, usually five to ten minutes in boiling water is enough for any variety of green corn. And once you get those steaming ears out, rush them to the table. They'll grow sad and shrivelled if they wait on top of the stove.

A friend of mine who has a husband who is inclined to be late home to dinner, tells me that she never puts her corn in to cook until she hears his step on the doorstep.

Have you ever noticed that you can seldom buy green corn at the grocery that tastes as good as corn picked from your own garden? Perhaps the corn at the store looked just as good, but somehow it lacked the same sweet flavor.

If you'd like a scientific backing for your observation, I'll tell you that people who have investigated say that fresh corn contains more sugar than corn that has had to stand for some time. The same is true of green peas, fresh lima beans, and so on. They explain that vegetables are living organisms actually still carrying on respiration after they are picked. The energy for respiration comes largely from the plant sugars. Another explanation for this loss of sweetness on standing, is that the sugar actually makes a chemical change to starch when it stands in a warm place. If you keep green corn in a room that is about 85 degrees F. for 24 hours, it will lose half its sugar, most of it by turning to starch. But if you keep the same corn at a temperature of 32 degrees F. -- that is, freezing temperature -- for two weeks, it will lose only a small amount of sugar.

You know the practical application of all this -- the moral of the story, so to speak. If you have corn in your own garden, gather it the last minute before cooking. Or, if you must keep it waiting after gathering, keep it in the refrigerator. When you go to market for corn, choose the ears that have come in fresh from the corn patch or have been in the refrigerator.

As for canning corn, the rule of freshness holds even more strongly here. Pick your ears fresh for canning. Don't pick so many that they must wait for hours or days before you get them into the pressure canner. Ask anyone in the commercial canning business if haste isn't necessary for good canned corn. In the old days when growers had the habit of piling sweet corn, warm from the fields, on a wagon ready for the cannery, and then letting the load stand all night holding its own heat, the corn in the morning was no longer sweet corn. It was just corn, minus most of its sugar.

Probably the most popular American way of cooking and serving new corn is "on the cob." You spread out a newspaper on the kitchen table first. That's to hold the untidy husks and silk. Pull off the husks. If the silk sticks, a brush will help you get it off. Gather up the refuse by folding up your paper. Start some salted water boiling in a large kettle while you're doing the husking. Then, when it's boiling, drop in the ears of corn.

Some people say boil only until the "milk inside the kernel is set." That's a rather indefinite rule. In general, small-kerneled sweet corn usually needs only five minutes. Close-grained corn like Shoe Peg or Country Gentleman takes about ten minutes. Lift the corn out of the kettle onto a platter and cover it with a napkin to hold in the heat.

People who prefer their corn off the cob like it served with milk and butter or cream. To make it a bit lively you can serve it with chopped green pepper or red pimiento. Some people like green corn and cooked tomatoes together. Succotash -- that old Indian dish of green corn and lima beans -- is always a favorite.

Some people like to use green corn as an ingredient in summer salad. You can mix the cooked kernels with rice and celery and then serve with well-seasoned salad dressing. If you have a little left-over cooked corn, you can use it to stuff green peppers or in corn fritters.

Before I go, maybe you'd like a simple menu for an August day: Cold sliced boiled tongue; Fried egg plant; Creamed corn; Sliced cucumbers, tomatoes and onions in French dressing; and, for dessert: Apple or peach dumpling.

